











**ALMA TADEMA**



AN EARTHLY PARADISE

("ALL THE HEAVENS OF HELL IN ONE HILL." CHILD.)

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Bell's Miniature Series of Painters

SIR LAWRENCE  
ALMA TADEMA  
R. A.

BY  
HELEN ZIMMERN



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## LIFE OF SIR LAWRENCE ALMA TADEMA

L AURENS ALMA TADEMA was born on January 8th, 1836, at Dronryp, a little town in the very heart of the Frisian province of Holland. Hence by birth Tadema is Dutch, though by residence and naturalization he is now an Englishman. His Dutch birth, as we shall see later, was not without significant effect upon the development and character of his art. The father, Pieter Tadema, was an intelligent lawyer with a pronounced taste for music. Unfortunately, while the young Laurens was still a baby, this parent died, and his education and upbringing were left entirely in the hands of the mother. A woman of unusual capacity, she found herself at an early age with four children upon her hands—two, a girl and our painter, being her own offspring, and two her husband's by a previous marriage. The means at her disposal were

small ; but undaunted, she put herself to fight single-handed the battle of life, and with such success, that by her unassisted efforts she was able to place all her children well. Laurens, her youngest, was also something of her darling, and even as a child he realized all his mother was doing on her children's behalf. To her early example no doubt are due his great powers of perseverance, his undaunted application, his high-minded sense of duty.

From the very first his favourite plaything was a pencil and paper ; he drew as by instinct. A family tradition survives to the effect that before he was five years old, Laurens had corrected an error in a drawing-master's design. Nature herself, therefore, seems to have pointed out his future career. But so the mother and guardians did not think. Art was regarded in those days as a profession which savoured of a discreditable character, and certainly not as one that could be rendered lucrative. It was therefore resolved that Laurens should follow in his father's footsteps.

This choice he found irksome to the last degree, and irksome, too, were the preliminary steps. For the dead languages he had no taste, for all dry-bone studies he had little use. His spare

hours, and often his lesson hours too, were spent in drawing, and many a time he would have himself awakened before daybreak in order that he might devote the hours before school time to working at his favourite pastime. He had no masters and little encouragement, nevertheless he plodded on, and with such good results that already, in 1851, he was able to exhibit in a Dutch gallery a portrait he had painted of his sister, a work that even in its immaturity betrays some of the qualities that distinguish his later and greater efforts in this department.

But the dual effort imposed on this young soul by the fight between duty and inclination was too heavy a physical burden for the juvenile shoulders to bear. A collapse of health occurred just as Laurens was growing up, and so serious did it seem that the doctors told the mother and guardians how, seeing the young man was not long for this world, it seemed needless to mar his few remaining months of existence by forcing him to continue his hated legal studies. For this short period at least he might be allowed to be happy following his bent. But what was the surprise of doctors and guardians when Laurens, as soon as the heavy strain was removed, recovered as though by magic, and rapidly be-

came the sturdy, robust man he has remained all his life.

It was now at last evident to those in authority that Tadema was a genius whose advance must not be thwarted or coerced ; art, therefore, was reluctantly acknowledged to be his proper profession, and to prepare himself for this he sought admission to an art academy.

Strange, nay almost incredible though it sounds, he could gain no admission to those of his native land. Antwerp, at that time a noted artistic centre, proved more discerning and less inhospitable. It chanced that Tadema entered at a moment when the rival claims of French pseudo-classicism and Belgian naturalism were dividing the Academy into factions.

The one, the Pseudo-classic, was headed by Louis David, who at that time was living in Antwerp in exile. The other, called the Belgian-Flemish School, aimed at reviving the ancient local art of the Low Countries. Alma Tadema was not made of the stuff to become a pseudo-classic or a pseudo anything. It was, therefore, quite natural that the young student ranged himself at once with those who sought to revive the best traditions of the Dutch and Flemish schools.

This native section was led by Wappers, and

Tadema soon became one of his most enthusiastic partisans.

A friend who knew him in those days has said, "Tadema did not work at Antwerp, he slaved in his efforts to make up for all the precious time that had been lost." Of his early efforts, however, none have survived. Tadema has no severer critic than Tadema himself, and to this day he will not allow a picture to leave his studio until he has made it as perfect as he knows how, so that he mercilessly destroyed all his tentative canvases that could not yet reproduce the perfected ideals of the master. Even in those early days the subjects belonged either to history proper or that ancient history which is half enveloped in myth.

It was about this time that Tadema added the prefix Alma to the paternal surname. Alma was the name of his godfather, and such a proceeding was, it seems, not unusual in Holland. Tadema's reason for taking this step was that in this wise his name in artistic catalogues was ranged among the A's instead of further down among the T's. Undoubtedly such apparent trifles do prove of consequence in helping or hindering a career.

From the Academy of Antwerp Alma Tadema passed into the studio of Hendrick van Leys,

the great Belgian archæologist and historical painter; his teaching, coming at the moment it did, proved of great value to Alma Tadema. Van Leys was just then busy decorating the Grand Town Hall of Antwerp with frescoes. In this work Alma Tadema was allowed to assist the master, and while so doing the young artist gained knowledge that proved of immense importance to his own after career. To van Leys' influence he owes his own historical accuracy and his attention to detail even the most minute. It also helped him to see objects truthfully and, what is equally important, to see them in mass. It is true that for a time van Leys' example was somewhat pernicious, since some of Alma Tadema's works of the period are visibly influenced by his master's dryness and harshness of execution. But the young man's own native bias toward rich and full colour was too strong for any influence long to repress the remarkable and idiosyncratic capacity that throbbed within him and was yearning to find full expression.

The subjects treated by van Leys in the Antwerp Guildhall were all taken from the history of the Low Countries. It was thus that Alma Tadema became acquainted with their

early annals by which his own first pictures were inspired.

It was the sale of one of these, *The Education of the Children of Clovis*, bought by the King of the Belgians, that made it possible for the young artist to call his mother and sister to live with him in Antwerp. This removal of his family gave Alma Tadema intense joy, for he is one of those wholesomely constituted beings to whom family life is an absolute necessity. In order for him to be happy and to have his mind free to work at his congenial occupation, it is needful to his nature that outside circumstances be calm, and that his existence be surrounded by an atmosphere of tenderness and affection.

Four years after joining her son, Madame Tadema died. It is sad to think that this good parent did not live to witness her son's world-wide fame, but pleasant to know that she still heard the praise aroused by some of his first exhibited pictures, and to see him the recipient of his first gold medal, that accorded to him at Amsterdam in 1862. In 1865 Tadema married a French lady, and removed to Brussels, where he remained until his wife's death. This occurred in 1869, when he was left alone with his sister and two little girls, the eldest, Laurence, who

has developed into a gifted writer, and the second, Anna, the delicate, dainty artist who has inherited so much of her father's power for reproducing detail.

It was during the lifetime of his first wife that Alma Tadema paid his first visit to Italy and saw with his own eyes the homes of those Romans who were destined to become his most familiar friends.

This journey, as might be expected, exerted a strong influence upon his art, but it did not entirely reverse all his views and methods, as has been the case with many other artists. The fact is that Alma Tadema had of set purpose avoided going to Italy before this date. On this point he had, and has always had, a very pronounced opinion. According to him the influence of Italy is so potent, so epoch-making in the life of an artist, that he should never go there until he is himself mature and has already found his own road. Otherwise all he sees in that magic land only helps to unsettle him, and hence hinders rather than helps forward the evolutionary development of the man's own artistic idiosyncrasy.

And indeed Alma Tadema's opinion would seem right on this point, though it is in direct

opposition to the practice of all the art schools and academies of the world. It is certainly strange how few of those who gain travelling scholarships, of those who are Prix de Rome and are sent to the Villa Medici, become great and original artists.

Speaking on this theme one day Tadema remarked, "Of what use is it to try and graft a branch laden with fruit upon a sapling. If the sapling has no trunk how is it possible to effect a graft? Rubens followed the right principle, and so after having extracted from foreign travel the best it could give he still remained Rubens. But what would have happened if he had undertaken his journey prematurely, that is to say before the artist inside him was fully developed?"

On another occasion Alma Tadema expressed his views on the same subject: "It is my belief that an art student ought not to travel. When once he has become an artist, conscious of his own aim, of his own wants, he will certainly profit by seeing the works of the great masters, because he will then be able to understand them, and can then, if necessary, appropriate such things as may appear useful to him. With one or two exceptions the Prix de Rome men are not the foremost of their day. Meissonier,

Gérôme, van Leys, remained at home till they had become consummate artists. Rembrandt never left Amsterdam, and Rubens, when travelling through Italy, made some sketches after Leonardo da Vinci which might pass as original Rubens, because Rubens was already Rubens when he did them. Vandyck and Velasquez travelled when they were already Vandyck and Velasquez, but not before."

The great picture dealer in those early days of Alma Tadema's art life was the Frenchman, M. Gambart, "Prince Gambart," as he used to be called in playful irony, for it was he who controlled and regulated the picture market of Europe, to the immense benefit of his own pocket. It is but fair, however, to add that he was a generous as well as a discerning dealer. When he was visiting any city in his commercial capacity, the whisper "Gambart is here!" would run round all the studios, and many a plot did unknown young artists lay in order to wile him into their workshops, and keen was the disappointment if the great man left the city after visiting only the studios of one or two of the most noted men, ignorant of all the schemes and plans that had been laid to entrap him.

The young Alma Tadema was among those

who plotted to secure a visit from the great Gambart, and he too was doomed to see his hopes dashed. At last, however, these hopes were fulfilled. It was thanks to van Ley, who had purposely given a wrong address to Gambart's coachman, directed to carry his master to the studio of a painter then much *en vogue*. Hence it came that the great dealer found himself in front of Alma Tadema's modest studio instead. In the doorway stood the young artist palpitating with excitement. Gambart, who by this time had perceived his error, was too good-natured to turn back without entering. After he had looked at the work upon the easel in silence, he suddenly asked in brusque tones, "Do you mean to tell me you painted this picture?" Alma Tadema bowed his acquiescence, he was too overcome to speak. "Well," replied the dealer, after asking the price and a few other details, "turn me out twenty-four other pictures of this kind and I will pay for them at progressive prices, raising the figure after each half dozen."

This was indeed an unexpected stroke of good fortune for Alma Tadema, who at once set to work to fulfil his commission. It was not all plain sailing however. Gambart wished to pin down the wings of the artist's fantasy, and it was only after

long discussion and bargaining that he permitted the painter to choose his themes from among classical subjects instead of remaining among those of the Middle Ages in which he had first found him engaged.

It was thus that some of the most famous of the artist's earlier works were included in this series ordered at so much the half dozen, as if they had been gloves or any article of haberdashery.

It took Alma Tadema four years to carry out Gambart's first commission. When he was at the finish of his task, Gambart once more appeared upon the scene.

"I want you to paint me another twenty-four pictures," was the quaint order given by this dealer—Maecenas again offering to remunerate Alma Tadema at an ascending rate of payment, only this time the starting point was a very much higher figure.

Once more the artist consented. The first work of the new series was the famous *Vintage*. When the dealer saw it he perceived that it was a far more important canvas than any of its predecessors, a work, too, that had cost the artist far more time and labour, and he at once insisted upon paying for it the figure which was to have

been given for the last half dozen. For Gambart, despite his profession and his bizarre ways, was liberal and generous, and perhaps he understood too that it paid to be honest.

Alma Tadema is fond of telling the tale how, when he had finished his second two dozen pictures, Gambart invited him and the whole artistic colony of Brussels to dinner. To our artist's no small surprise, he found that it was he who was the guest of honour. In front of his plate there shone a silver goblet bearing a most flattering inscription, while into his table-napkin was folded a large cheque, a sum accorded to him by Gambart beyond the stipulated price.

An accident brought Tadema to London in 1870, and here he at once took root. A year later he remarried, his wife this time being Miss Laura Theresa Epps, a woman of rare beauty, and herself a painter of distinction.

For many years Tadema's home was in Regent's Park Road, a modest London residence which by his ingenuity he transformed into a fairy palace. He afterwards moved into larger quarters in Grove End Road, where he has reared a house entirely upon his own designs that repeats on a larger and more sumptuous scale the beauties of the earlier residence.

In Alma Tadema's case the environment does indeed explain the man. His keen sense of beauty, his classic tastes, his love of flowers, make themselves felt in every nook and corner of his abode ; in the silver-walled studio with its onyx windows, in its mosaic atrium, in which a fountain splashes, in Lady Tadema's special room with its oak-beamed ceiling, its Dutch panelling, its old Dutch furniture, in its low-windowed library packed with splendid illustrated works on artistic themes, in its pretty garden ever gay with blossoms, with its fish pond and trellised colonnade. In almost every room can be reconstructed the scenes of his pictures ; the lustrous marble basin in the sky-lit atrium bears upon its sloping rim a heap of withered rose leaves, faintly recording that rich shower of fragrance which once suggested a striking detail in the Heliogabalus picture. The burnished brass steps appearing at frequent intervals figure over and over again in the pictures of Roman villas and classical environments. Perhaps one of the most striking features of this house, which is filled with objects of priceless worth, is its unevenness of pavement. There are such endless nooks and alcoves, each room is conceived upon a different scale and may be lower or higher

than its immediate neighbour, and yet, most marvellous of all, the cluster of beautiful apartments perfectly harmonize one with another. From the oblong entrance hall, over whose fireplace runs the greeting,

“I count myself in nothing else so happy  
As in a soul remembering my good friends”,

whose wall decorations consist in panels painted for the artist by his friends, to the low-lying dining-room, looking upon the garden and shaded by the great tree which it is Tadema's delight to watch in its leaf unfolding, its full summer verdure and its winter gauntless, all is beautiful, all is sympathetic, and all is the result of an ardent appreciation of the artistic possibilities of the most humble objects of domestic life.

Through all the rooms are scattered portraits of its beautiful women inmates, here a statue of Lady Alma Tadema, there a window into whose delicately coloured panes are fashioned the likenesses of the quaint little girls who have now grown to women, outside under the window of these same daughters' room is a beautiful bit of sculptured frieze bearing the interwoven tulips of Holland, lilies of France, and English roses.

The most frequent guest finds continual surprises in this house whose every accessory is as carefully conceived as one of the details of its master's pictures.

Holland, Greece, London and Rome have all contributed their quota to render this house *sui generis*, and once we have passed the postern gate that leads from Grove End Road into the garden we instinctively feel ourselves incorporated into another world, another clime, and London and its squalor, its fogs and cold, are forgotten for a time.

It is in this congenial *milieu* that the artist works, a *milieu* helpful and suggestive to the special character of his art. His life since his removal to England has been uneventful. The saying, "Happy those who have no history" might be applied to Tadema. Hard work, persistent study, unremitting efforts after ever greater perfection of style and treatment, sum up Alma Tadema's artistic existence.

He is essentially a sociable man, a lover of his kind. His work is only interrupted by visits from friends, by weekly afternoon and evening receptions, so charming that the entrée is greatly coveted, by the claims upon his time as Professor at the Royal Academy and member of the



A READING, IRON HOMER.

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Council ; demands all of which he fulfils with his characteristic strenuousness and high sense of duty. In 1876 he became an Associate Member of the Royal Academy, and in 1879 a Royal Academician. In 1899 he received the well-merited honour of knighthood at the hands of Queen Victoria.

It is not often that Alma Tadema leaves the house to which he is devoted, both for its beauty and because it harbours all whom he holds dear, for he is essentially a domestic man. Occasional visits to the English country, which he greatly admires, and rare trips to Italy, which he naturally loves, are all the holidays he allows himself, and even during such changes of place he does not permit himself rest, but is ever studying fresh effects of light and colour, fresh combinations, imbibing fresh artistic suggestions. Nothing escapes Tadema's wide-open eyes ; he is never too weary to receive a new impression.

As a man he has about him no trace of the pedantry which might be anticipated from the archaic character of his work. He is generous, genial, warm-hearted, a lover of jokes and anecdotes good and bad, a cheery optimist, a boon companion in the best sense of that term. He is also the truest and most faithful of friends, and

the kindest and most large-hearted of teachers. His appreciation of the works of others is wide and sincere, and, no matter how different this work may be from his own style and taste, he gives to it its due meed of praise, provided it be executed with honest intent.

London society is familiar with this wiry, strong-set figure, with this face of kindly comeliness, with the cheery voice, with the frank, observant eye, the merry quips and pranks, the energy, the intense love of all that is great, and good, and lovely. To be with him is to feel invigorated, for he seems to have so much superfluous vitality that he is able to dispense it to his surroundings.

Of his art he rarely speaks, and still more rarely of his art-theories. Indeed he is no theorist, though he knows perfectly well at what ends he aims, and his art, like his personality, is homogeneous throughout. But it is not in his nature to analyze, he follows his instincts, and these are true and right. "To thine own self be true," has been his life motto, and faithfully has he served it.

## THE WORK OF ALMA TADEMA

THE first in date of Alma Tadema's preserved paintings is a cycle of pictures dealing with Merovingian times. To these Merovingians he was early attracted, partly perhaps because in his old home and birthplace relics, such as coins, medals, armour belonging to that epoch were the only antiquities the soil could boast. Added to this, chance threw into his way Gregory of Tours' History of the Franks and the quaint old chronicler completely captivated his fancy. From this treasure-house of fact and fiction he drew a series of pictures which, if no more historically correct than Gregory himself, were nevertheless carefully pondered pieces of archaeological improvisation in which the minute studies of accessories made while still in Frisia stood Alma Tadema in good stead. *Clotilde at the Grave of her Grandchildren* was an incident entirely without foundation in fact, but one of Gregory's stories had suggested the situation, and Tadema at once

realized its dramatic and pictorial possibilities. In treatment this canvas was still a little hard and dry, the influence of van Leys' somewhat arid manner was too apparent. The same criticism applies, but in a less degree, to its successor, the work that won for Alma Tadema his first success, *The Education of the Children of Clovis*. This, too, was inspired by the old Frankish chronicler, and here also, as often in Alma Tadema's art, a good deal of previous knowledge is requisite in order fully to appreciate the composition. It cannot be denied that this is one of the difficulties of truly understanding the painter's work. His subjects are apt to be at times a little too archaeological, a little too literary for immediate or easy explanation. Their atmosphere is inclined to be somewhat remote from common knowledge or interest. Nevertheless in this canvas the tale is sufficiently told, and already the real Alma Tadema is making himself felt in the greater richness of the colouring and in the skilful disposition of the figures. Quite especially free and energetic is the figure of the eldest boy throwing his axe at the mark, and that of his teacher looking on intently to see how his charge conducts himself during this public exposition of his prowess. This work, which is

now the property of the King of the Belgians, was bought by the Antwerp Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts for the paltry sum of one thousand six hundred francs, an amount which at the time seemed a large remuneration to its painter.

This picture was followed by yet others, all inspired by the Merovingian chronicles that had taken such a firm hold upon the artist's imagination. In each successive picture the scheme of colour grew fuller and warmer, the dull manner of the master van Leys was more and more abandoned, the real Alma Tadema made himself more and more felt. His own individuality, his own methods of conception became manifest. This is especially the case in a picture called *Gonthram Bone*, another of the Merovingian series. We here see Alma Tadema already applying his peculiar capacity of filling in every inch of the canvas, thus often giving to the tiniest space a sense of vastness, of distance, of immensity, that renders his smallest works such marvellous gems of concentrated beauty. Of course it took time to learn to do this without arousing a sense of overcrowding, a fault that occurs even in one or two of his later works, but more and more as he advanced this danger

was eliminated and the capabilities hidden in this artifice became ever more manifest. The little figures with which he peopled his pictures also steadily advanced in correctness of movement and bore about them a local physiognomy that revived an entire historical epoch in a few square inches of canvas. The whole Merovingian period seemed incarnated in these works.

This same capacity of resuscitating a remote historical time was yet more pleasantly revealed when Alma Tadema at last turned from painting these gorgeous but bloodthirsty barbarians, and applied himself instead to the mysterious land of Egypt, the source of all culture and all knowledge, the land he has never seen, but which he has apprehended so wonderfully with the eye of his brain. The German Egyptologist and novelist, George Ebers, a friend of Alma Tadema's, to whom he dedicated one of his historical tales, once asked him what it was that had turned him from his Franks towards the land of Isis. Alma Tadema replied, "Where else should I have begun as soon as I became acquainted with the life of the ancients? The first thing a child learns of ancient history is about the Court of Pharaoh, and if we go back to the source of art and science must we not return to Egypt?"

This migration to the Nile closed what may be termed Alma Tadema's first artistic period, which embraces the ten years that lie between 1852 and 1862. In 1863 he exhibited his *Egyptians Three Thousand Years Ago*. Here, though archaeological knowledge was manifest, Tadema did not sacrifice his picture to a pedantic display of learning. On the contrary, it rather seemed his object to show that these dead and gone old Egyptians, whom we are too inclined to think of as the stiff, lifeless figures that greet us from the temples and stone carvings of their native land, were men and women like to ourselves. A work such as this exhibited great study, more perhaps than that demanded by his Merovingians. But from the outset it was evident that Alma Tadema would not covenant with prevailing fashions in art in order to buy public favour at a cheap price. He would take up no task which did not commend itself to his æsthetic faith, to his individual inclination, to the particular preferences of his taste. Never, even at the outset of his career, when financial success had not yet come, did Alma Tadema convert his function of artist into an easy or lucrative profession.

In *The Mummy*, *The Widow*, *The Egyptian*

*at his Doorway*, Tadema for the first time applies the methods of genre painting to the treatment of antique themes. This novel manner of dealing with archaeology, which is really of his creation, has found a large school of imitators, none of whom, however, approach the master either for spontaneity of conception or skill of execution. This leaning towards genre and its application to subjects that had hitherto not invited treatment in this manner, may probably be traced to Tadema's Dutch origin, seeing that the Dutch were past masters in this form of composition, which by them was chiefly used to illustrate trivial moments of their immediate environment.

The most remarkable of these works is the *Death of the First-born*; indeed, Tadema ranks it as his best picture, and has never yet accepted any offer for its purchase. It hangs permanently in his studio, and is looked upon by his family as a priceless possession. The date of this work is 1873, when the artist had already begun to turn his attention to those Greco-Roman themes with which his fame has since been so closely associated. As the picture is not familiar to the world from reproductions, we will describe it at length.

In this picture of the last, worst plague of Egypt,

we find pathos, despair, and that silent grief which "whispers to the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break."

We enter a great Egyptian temple where darkness and gloom, oppressive in their intensity, are only relieved by the gleam of moonlight seen through a distant doorway, and by a single lamp which makes the surrounding shadows more deep. In the foreground is a pillar with hieroglyphics inscribed upon it, its capital lost in the darkness gives a strange sense of awe, but the pervading influence, the power of the scene, is the apprehension of death which seems to rest over the mighty columns, which fills the great temple, which bows to the earth Pharaoh himself, for it is his first-born who lies dead before him. Priests and musicians are gathered round lamps standing on the floor. The priests are chanting their prayers, and the musicians are touching strange-looking instruments. The entire effect is gloomy and awe-inspiring in the extreme. The colouring is sombre with its inimitable use of greens and browns. The surroundings fitly prepare us for the central group of four persons who cluster round the figure of the desolate king. It is one of the extraordinary effects of this picture that

the accessories strike the observer first, and in their mournful disposition prepare him for the chief interest, although both spiritually and actually, Pharaoh and his attendants hold the centre of the canvas. The king sits upon a low stool, and across his knees lies the slender body of his first-born. The dead face of the almost nude youth is indescribably sweet, and around his neck hangs limply a strangely-fashioned golden chain, probably bearing some amulet to shield the king's son from harm. The king, upon whose figure the light falls, wears his crown, the brilliant jewels of which seem to mock his helpless grief. He sits rigid, immovable, the strong, proud man will make no sign, but there is one feature which even his powerful will cannot control, his mouth trembles ever so slightly, so faintly that at first it is not distinguishable. But what grief it expresses, this faint indistinctness of outline! This figure might be taken as the embodiment of grief, grief fixed and immutable, and like all true emotion, truly expressed, with not a hint of morbidness. The mother sits near, bowed to the earth in her sorrow. She, too, has striven to be strong, and even in this outburst of despair, shows self-restraint. At the other side of Pharaoh sits the physician whose powers

have been useless in this combat. Outside the temple door two figures approach. They are Moses and Aaron coming to behold their work.

This is a truly marvellous picture, and it is not strange that Alma Tadéma retains it in his own hands. It is so true, so complex, so alive, that at every view, with every changing light it reveals new features, new aspects of sorrow, and yet with its profundity of sorrow it is not too tragic to live with. It is so true, so human, so beautiful, and so deep, that it does not repel. About Alma Tadema's art there is nothing false or strained ; he is always healthy, there is in his nature no strain of morbidness, and hence whatever he paints appeals direct to the truest feelings, whether he paints the glad, sensuous world of the ancients, or the tragedies which befell them, there is never in his work the sickly introspection, the hyper-analysis of modern days. Just as in his *Tarquinius* and *Emperor*, Alma Tadema proved that he could express tragedy, so here he has shown conclusively that he can express pathos and that he is possessed of a deep imagination, which, unfortunately, he puts forth all too rarely. Had Alma Tadema created but this one superb work he would be among the greatest artists of our time.

This *Death of the First-born* is a true representation of Egyptian life, and, as if to prove how accurate are the artist's instincts, it is noteworthy that he placed at the feet of the dead a wreath of flowers which strikingly resembles a like garland, found ten years after the picture was painted, in the royal tombs of Deir el Bahari.

Meantime however, as we have said, he had begun to paint genre pictures of Greek and Roman life, and so numerous are these, so rapidly did he produce them, that it is impossible in our limited space to enumerate even the most important. We have chosen a few at random, taking care however to select from among the most noteworthy. One of his finest early Roman pictures is, beyond question, the *Tarquinius Superbus*, in which Tadema has shown what tragic power he could wield when he wished. But his general inclination leads him to let us see his men and women merely as they present their outward faces. He cares not to look beyond, to apprehend the informing intention, the psychic force of his creations.

This idiosyncrasy is based on the artist's character which is singularly direct, and to which introspection and analytic research is distasteful. Of quite a different character is the

*Pyrrhic Dance*, a wonderful *tour de force*. We are made to feel that these Dorian fighters, executing a war-dance, are heavily armed, and that it is only their skill and agility which makes their choregraphic evolutions appear light under such heavily handicapped conditions. Indeed, as we know from history, but few could execute with grace and skill this "mimic warrior armour game" as Plato calls it, it might so easily become ridiculous and it is not the least of Tadema's merits in this canvas that he has treated it without the least touch of exaggeration, and with a gravity and dignity that are truly admirable.

*The Vintage*, painted just before Tadema's removal to England, is in some respects one of his most important and most characteristic works. It has been objected that Alma Tadema is essentially a painter of repose. To this picture as well as to the *Pyrrhic Dance* this criticism cannot be applied. The first thing that strikes us as we look at the work is the sense of motion and music which it imparts. Another of the objections sometimes made to Alma Tadema's work is that his men and women, but more especially his women, are not in accordance with usually recognized classical standards. His

favourite types are rather of the heavy build that would be connected more readily with Holland than with Rome, though in some of the portrait busts of empresses preserved in the Vatican, and other sculpture galleries, we see frequent precedents for this preference, a preference that became more and more emphasized after the artist's removal to England. In learning, in technical excellence, in the remarkable finish of all the multitudinous details, the work is admirable. Here, too, he has not permitted the details to distract our attention from the main intention of the picture; we think first and last of the procession and put the accessories, correct and wonderfully painted though they are, into their proper artistic place. Alma Tadema's pictures may at times seem to proclaim too loudly the equality of all visible things, and this equal attention to each object sometimes prevents the concentration of our attention upon the central point of interest. It is this peculiarity which led Ruskin to make his savage and most unfair onslaught upon the painter in his Academy Notes of 1875.

The *Sculpture Gallery*, a newer and more skilful version of a previous picture on the same theme, painted in 1864, furnished the tag upon

which Ruskin hung his attack. This later *Sculpture Gallery* was the companion to the *Picture Gallery* exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1874, which was again a sort of extension of an earlier work called the *Roman Amateur*. In the atrium of a Roman house, a fat swarthy Roman, a man of little distinction, no doubt a *nouveau riche* of his period, exhibits to his visitors a silver statue. There is an impressive pomposity about his manner, as though he were dilating upon the statue's intrinsic metallic worth rather than upon its artistic merits, and his guests seem to be on the level of his own artistic tastes.

In the two versions of the *Sculpture Gallery* this idea is extended. In the first version the famous Lateran statue of Sophocles was introduced, and indeed forms the central point of interest. Around it are grouped three Romans, one woman and two men, evidently eagerly discussing its artistic merits. All Tadema's fine draughtsmanship, all his unique skill in the painting of lucent surfaces is here to the fore.

The second *Sculpture Gallery* was yet more elaborate in design and purpose. The work of art exhibited in this instance is placed within a back shop of the epoch, the front towards the streets being reserved for smaller and less im-

portant objects. A company of rich amateurs has evidently sauntered in to behold the latest acquisitions of the dealer. A colossal vase, poised upon a revolving pedestal, is especially claiming their attention. A slave slowly turns it round that they may view it in every light. We know him to be a slave by the crescent-shaped token he wears suspended from his neck. The effect of in-door and out-door illumination, and of reflected light from the shimmering surfaces of the objects in the shop is rendered with scientific accuracy and rare technical ability. Full of ingenious and most difficult light effects, too, is the *Picture Gallery*, in which we see a crowd of noble Roman dames and knights admiring the triptychs of the period wherewith the walls are hung and the easels loaded.

This theme, with considerable variants, had been treated once before by Tadema. Indeed, he is fond of repeating his initial idea in different shape. This time the work is called *Antistius Labeon*. It represents an amateur Roman painter, a contemporary of Vespasian, showing off his latest productions to the friends who have dropped into his studio. It seems, so Tadema tells us, that the gentleman painter, who was a Roman pro-consul, was rather looked down upon



AN IHL SHRINE OF VINUS.



by his contemporaries for his amateur tastes. It was thought gentlemanly in those days to admire art but not to practise it, an idea that even in early Victorian days we find not quite extinct.

It was on these two fine works, *The Sculpture Gallery* and *The Picture Gallery*, that Alma Tadema's world-wide reputation was first based. A great continental dealer bought them, and as engravings as well as in the widely exhibited originals they became familiar to all lovers of the beautiful. From this time onward Alma Tadema could not paint fast enough to satisfy the demands made upon his brush ; but this success only increased the rigidity of the demands he made upon himself. The more successful Alma Tadema has been, the more conscientious has he become, a rare quality, and one that cannot be too highly praised or too much admired. His passionate love of colour, a passion that seems to have grown upon him as time passed, and as he abandoned more and more his earlier drier manner, found expression after his election as associate to the Royal Academy in a number of small but most perfect little canvases that often dealt with nothing in particular, and to which the artist was at times embarrassed to give names, or whose titles, when found, were not specially

distinctive, but which each in their kind was a perfect gem of technique of radiant tints. And after all, why need a picture have a name, *à tout prix*? Whistler was not so wrong when he labelled some of his works as "Symphonies" and "Harmonies" of colour. Such titles would best describe many of Alma Tadema's smaller colour creations.

And now, his own line fully found, Tadema worked on steadily, without haste or pause. In a *milieu* far distant indeed from the scene of their creation, a London atmosphere, a London sky, he caused to live again for a while in effigy the men and maidens of Magna Graecia, of Rome, of Parthenope, and above all of Sicily, for Tadema's out-door scenes are too southern in feeling and in tone even for the furthest shores of the Peninsula, and belong by rights to the Syren isle. Here alone are found the unclouded sapphire skies, the seas sun-bathed and innocent of angry waves, the luxuriant vegetation, the mad wealth of roses that seem to spring by magic from Tadema's brush, and are the outcome of his fervid imagination that can behold these things with his mental vision while fog and grim winter are raging outside. It is one of Tadema's rare and precious gifts that he can see his picture

finished before he has put brush to canvas. It is this gift which makes it unnecessary for him to execute the usual amount of sketching, indeed, Tadema may be said not to sketch at all ; it is this that lends to his hand his rare security, and this that helps towards his precision of execution. Everything is clearly, sharply outlined in his art. His canvases show no quiet, slumberous distances, no mysterious twilights of life or nature. All is evident, all is distinct, all sharply defined as in the meridional landscape that he loves, and all this is rendered with that accuracy, with those small touches of extreme sharpness, which recall the precise methods of his Dutch pictorial ancestors. These are merits, but they are merits that also contain hidden within their excellence the germs of what by some may be considered as defects. There is apt to be a lack of repose about a picture of Alma Tadema's, our eye is not necessarily led at once to the central purpose of the work, each action seems of equal importance, and is painted in the same scheme of values.

As an example of Alma Tadema's painstaking, and of how he lets no trouble or expense stand in the way of making his pictures just as perfect as possible, it may be mentioned that during the

whole of the winter when he was at work on his *Heliogabalus* the artist sent twice a week for boxes of fresh roses from the Riviera. Thus each flower may be said to have been painted from a different model.

Only once in his life did Alma Tadema paint a life-size nude figure. This was the work called *A Sculptor's Model*. It was inspired by the Venus of the Esquiline, then but lately unearthed ; the painter's intention was to show, as far as possible, the conditions under which such a masterpiece might have been created. It was also painted as a model for his pupil John Collier, one of the very few pupils whom Alma Tadema has ever received into his studio.

It should be mentioned that Alma Tadema at times paints in water colours as well as in oils, a medium he manipulates most successfully, and which lends itself most admirably to his limpid effects of sea and sky. He has also of late years taken to portrait painting. His wonderfully careful technique has here full play, and the perfection of finish fills us with admiration. But, despite their merits, it is hard to think of these portraits as Alma Tadema's ; with his name, whether we will or no, we are forced to associate blue skies, placid seas, spring flowers, youths and

maidens in the heyday of life, and a sense of old-world happiness and distance from our less beautiful modern existence and surroundings.

## THE ART OF ALMA TADEMA

IT is fortunately not possible to define with real precision the position Sir Lawrence Alma Tadema occupies in art, since happily he is still living and working among us—and long may he so live to turn out yet other scores of sun-filled joyous canvases, speaking to a weary and hard-driven generation, of vanished and more placid times, when existence was less restless and more æsthetically conceived! Nor, though he has had imitators by the dozen, is it as yet possible to determine the exact nature of the influence he has exerted upon the art of his age, for with rare exceptions these imitators have turned out frigid, lifeless works that bear the same relation to the master's style and manner as oleographs bear to original paintings. Neither is it quite possible to classify Alma Tadema's manner. A number of influences, partly extraneous, or accidental, partly the result of birth and atavism, have resulted in causing his art to be *sui generis*. If he must be classed at all,

although a much younger man, he might be grouped with those artists who came to the fore on the continent soon after the upheaving epoch of 1848, men who endeavoured to revive the more intimate life of Greece and Rome upon their canvas, and who in France went by the name of neo-Greeks or Pompeists. This trend was a reaction from the older classical school that was headed by Jacques Louis David, whose productions were distinguished by a certain austere dignity of conception, by elaborate accuracy of form, but, on the other hand, were generally cold and unreal in sentiment, unpleasantly monotonous in colouring, and defective in their arrangement of light and shade.

It has been most felicitously remarked, that if David may be named the Corneille of the Roman Empire, Alma Tadema may be said to be its Sardou. He has made his ancients more living, he has resuscitated them with less visible effort ; he seems to have an instinctive comprehension of antiquity. His is not the Rome of Ingres, of Poussin, of grand public ceremonies, of battles, of the Forum and the rostrum, of actions that upheaved the world ; he gives us instead the home life of this people, Rome such as we divine it to have been from Cicero's letters to

Atticus, the life of the ancients as presented to us in the plays of Terence and Plautus. It is not mere historical painting that he aims at, indeed his art bears the same relation to history as does the anecdote to serious narrative, a lighter species which nevertheless often throws a brighter light upon the past than scores of learned tomes. And this result is largely achieved by his love of detail, which causes him to crowd his canvas with masses of those authentic *bibelots* which ancient and recent excavations and the aid of photography have brought within the reach of all.

The elder classical painters thought to render their work more truly classical by placing their protagonists in large empty monumental spaces, just as Corneille and Racine thought to give the true classical ring to their plays when they removed them from every-day emotions, and rolled out high-sounding and rhetorical phrases. Alma Tadema, instead, is convinced that these dead-and-gone folk were in all fundamental essentials like to ourselves, that they lived, loved, joked and chattered just as we do, and this conviction has found expression in his pictures that deal less and less with the graver, grander moments of their existence, and more with the

petty intimate details of their home life. His pictures might almost be said to be a series of instantaneous reproductions of the life of the Roman patricians. The plebs have no interest for him, they rarely figure in his canvases, and when they do their figures are entirely subordinate. The Roman of Alma Tadema's pictures abides in a world of idle luxury, in which nothing matters much unless it ministers to sensuous enjoyment. It is the outward seeming of life and objects that attracts him, their inner deeper meaning matters to him as little as their subject. The life aim of his men and women seems to be to exist happily and placidly, untroubled by material cares or disturbing emotions.

In his method of composing his pictures Alma Tadema's manner is also the absolute antithesis of what is commonly regarded as the classic method. So far is he from putting his principal personages well into the middle of his canvas, from following a pyramidal arrangement, that in his effort to be natural and unconventional, he even at times commits extravagances in order to escape from the beaten path, as, for example, in his portrait of Dr. Epps, in which there are shown one head and a bust, no arms, but three hands, the third being that of the unseen patient

whose pulse the physician is supposed to feel. This is an extreme instance, but a tendency to dismember his figures, to show us only half a figure, a detached head, a hand without a body, a foot without a visible leg, occurs every now and again, and not certainly to the detriment of a realistic effect, but most certainly to the detriment of composition as classically understood. This tendency, no doubt, results from his love of Japanese art, an art that has had a visible influence upon his methods of disposing his composition. Indeed, it might almost be said that Alma Tadema does not compose his pictures at all. He certainly does not do so according to the ordinary acceptance of the term in art, he rather disposes his personages about his canvas, apparently at hazard, much as they might group themselves in real life. But under this seeming negligence, is hidden great care, immense painstaking, a striving to give to his pictures their maximum of expressive force, for in Alma Tadema's work, everything as well as every person, has its suggestive purpose. As M. de la Sizeranne has well said, few painters have less of that element which in the jargon of the studio is known as *poids mort*. But this very merit causes his pictures to lack concentration. There is no

point on which our eye fixes at once as the central, most important, and the meaning of the whole may often be hidden in some accessory that the ordinary observer is apt to overlook. Thus, for example, in one of his Claudio series is seen, poised on a cippus, a head of Augustus, dominating as it were the whole bloody, rowdy, undignified scene. How many who see the work have remarked that the bust is turned toward a picture that represents a naval engagement, and that underneath this picture is written the single word "Actium," suggestive of a vast antithesis. Subtle little touches such as these often render Alma Tadema's more important works a puzzle to those unversed in classic lore, and oblige us to class him, if classed he must be, among the erudite artists whose roots are planted in the soil of literature. Yet, surely, if there exists a domain where erudition should take a secondary place it is that of art, which shares with poetry the high privilege of soaring so high as to have the right to disdain the mere minutiae of history, the petty details of life.

Happily, Alma Tadema is saved from being a cold, unattractive antiquarian painter by his rare keen sense of beauty, and here again we come in contact with the difficulty of ranging him

as we might range his pseudo-classic brethren. The spectator who misses the allusions, the meaning of his subject-pictures, nevertheless finds matter for full and intense enjoyment as he contemplates the lovely fabrics, the cool half-shades, the clear sunlight, the exquisite flowers, the heat-saturated sea and sky, the marbles and the bric-à-brac that appear on almost every canvas, and are painted with a skill, a consummate science that captivates the connoisseur, and with a reality that delights the uninstructed crowd.

Briefly, Alma Tadema's double nationality, his Dutch birth, his long English residence, coupled with his classic tastes, his admiration for the Japanese, have contributed to render his art a curious complex of conflicting tendencies, tendencies that in themselves are again welded into a harmonious whole by the idiosyncrasy of the man. We seem to feel, even through the medium of his pictures, his kind-heartedness, his quick appreciation of all that is good and beautiful, his dislike of mystery, of vain searchings in dark mental places, his love of sunshine, moral and teal. Others might paint his portraits as well, but none can paint those exquisite southern idylls of which such numbers have issued from his brush and brain. He has been called

the painter of repose. I should rather be inclined to style him the painter of gladness, of the joy of life. The artistic world has certainly been rendered the sunnier by his works.

## OUR ILLUSTRATIONS

A MONGST the many famous and popular pictures by Alma Tadema it is a little difficult to know which to select, and our object has been to make a representative collection, while avoiding those which are already familiar to all through the windows of the print shops. A work that shows him in one of his most tragic moments, a mood he does not often exhibit, for this master of sunny nature prefers to paint sunny themes, is the *Ave Caesar! Id  
Saturnalia!* The story of Caligula's tragic ending and the election of Claudius as Emperor seems to have had a curious attraction for the artist. He painted the theme three times, though with considerable variants, first as the *Claudius*, then as *The Roman Emperor*, and finally, and in its finest version, as the *Ave Caesar! Id  
Saturnalia!*

The first of the series on the subject simply styled *Claudius* though full of life, solemnity and graphic force, was surpassed by its successors, into

which the artist infused more of his wonderful genius for archæological divination. This first *Claudius* belonged to a set of pictures ordered from Alma Tadema by the dealer M. Gambart.

The second, *The Roman Emperor*, was painted after his removal to London. In this new version Alma Tadema also adopted a scheme of colour that was absolutely new to him, to the consternation, it is said, of some of his clients, who saw in this departure an alarming tendency towards pre-Raphaelitism. According to them it was distinctly unfair to the public for this artist to change his style. Where were the white marbles, the dresses of pale, soft tints to which they were accustomed in his canvases? Here he had boldly introduced a girl of the Roman people with hair of pure copper tints, and even the corpse was clad in a dress of brilliant blue and vivid purple, while the purity of the marble pavement was stained not only with the blood of the slain, but was also a confusion of restless coloured mosaics that distracted the eye from the picture's main purpose. Criticism waxed hot around this canvas which seemed to threaten a revolution in the artist's methods.

But it was only a passing phase and proved of

no real import. Alma Tadema's pictures continued as before to be distinguished by a certain calm and majestic solemnity, such as suits best the Roman people whom by choice he represented. Still this third and finest version of the Claudius story can scarcely be classed among his calmer works. It is dramatic and full of movement. For brilliant colouring, for vigorous drawing, for its admirable archaeological verity this picture is distinguished even among Alma Tadema's many distinguished works. Note too that it is painted in proportions so small as would hardly suffice a latter-day Italian artist for the depicting of a cauliflower. But Alma Tadema, far from thinking that a canvas must be large in proportion to the importance of his subject, is of the opinion that minute dimensions tend to excite the imagination and give to a work a more poetic and ideal character.

In this *Ave Caesar! Id Saturnalia!* we look upon the man whose supposed imbecility saved him from the cruel fate to which Caligula subjected his relations, found by the soldiery in a corner of the palace where he had hid himself in his dread, a hiding place whence the Praetorians dragged him forth and proclaimed him

"WIL CÉSAR" TO SAVURNHIA  
By *John S. K. P. R. G. and G. H.*





their ruler. We see the elected Emperor, his face blanched with terror, holding for support to the curtain which has lately hid his trembling form from the pursuing soldiers and the populace. These ironically salute him as Imperator. Especially obsequious and excellent in rendering is the figure of the guard who has drawn aside the heavy drapery. A confused heap of corpses, all that is left of those who have been slain in defence of their murdered master, litter the marble pavement. Above them, laurel crowned, smile down in marble indifference the portrait busts of other Caesars now dead and gone to their account. In the far corner is huddled the populace mingled with the lance-bearing soldiers. They are sarcastically amused by Claudius's undignified election to the great Roman throne. Tragedy and comedy are most felicitously fused. Furthermore, wonderful though the details be, as they always are with Alma Tadema, in this case the accessories do not withdraw our attention for one moment from the human interest. Marbles and draperies, metals and flowers, though so perfectly rendered, take their natural place in the composition without detracting from the central interest.

And yet how exquisite in their archæological

and æsthetic perfection are these accessories. No wonder that in a picture from Alma Tadema's hand we look quite as much for the marbles, the hangings, the stuffs, the mosaics, the trees, and the flowers, as for the faces of his creations. It would almost seem at times as though he had painted these accessories with even more care than he bestowed upon his men and women, as if they interested him more. Indeed, where flowers are concerned Alma Tadema seems to give to them an inner life, a very physiognomy, his flowers are inimitable, both as suggestions and as realities. Even in the choice made it is quite remarkable how there is always a peculiar fitness to the picture's theme. Is there not, for example, to note but a few instances, a tragic impress about the poppy beds in his picture of *Tarquinius Superbus*? Have not his red and pink oleanders a bloom and blush as fitting as that on the faces of the young lovers they shade? Do not the cypresses and the stone pines in his *Improvvisor* adumbrate all the solemn mournfulness of a Roman garden? Is there not a sensual note in the prodigality of roses that inundates his *Heliogabalus*? Are they not almost arch in his *Love's Missile*, in *Shy*, to name but a few of the many pictures in which trees and



## SPRING.

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flowers figure as the very embodiment of the summer of life and nature.

Indeed, so exquisitely, so superbly painted are these flowers that in some of Alma Tadema's minor pictures they actually assume the upper hand, though of course unconsciously to the painter, and become the protagonists in the composition. There is one picture which he calls simply *Oleanders*, showing that he recognized himself how the flowers had impressed his imagination and gained precedence over the human beings with whom they were associated. Tadema's flowers are very poems, and had he painted nothing but these he would have been a great artist.

It was of course inevitable that when he chose *Spring* as his theme the composition should be rich in the delineation of such blossoms. In this picture all the perfumed profusion of a southern May is summed up within the space of one little canvas. A bevy of matrons, maidens and children precedes what was probably an ecclesiastical procession. They wend their way through the marble-paved streets of Imperial Rome to some temple shrine, therein to celebrate the rites of joy due to the newly awakened

season. Flower-crowned are the fair human blossoms, flower-laden their garments, flower-filled the "offering-platters" they are about to lay on the altar of the god. The house-tops, those fair flat house-tops of Southern Italy, the spaces between the columns, the loggias and the porticoes, are crowded with eager spectators. These, too, are flower-wreathed and flower-laden. Joy-filled, spring-intoxicated, they rain down upon the gay procession beneath, posies and blossoms in glad and multi-coloured abundance. Marble and flowers, sunshine and blue skies, all life's gladness is here embodied by a painter's loving brush.

And how easy it all looks. We feel as if the painter had just thrown all this lovely profusion with rapid hand upon the canvas. But those who have the privilege of knowing Alma Tadema intimately and have watched the genesis of his pictures, watched them as they grow from under his brush, know how long and patiently he worked at this very canvas which gives an effect of spontaneity as though created *d'un seul jet*. Again and again did he scrape down his work, erasing recklessly the most exquisite little figures, the most perfectly modelled heads, because they failed to satisfy the exigencies of the

painter. Hence in this finished form the *Spring* represents the work of two or three pictures. And this is constantly the case in Alma Tadema's paintings. From each canvas has been erased some gem, under each picture is hidden some exquisite detail, painted over regardlessly by the artist ; no matter how lovely it may be in itself, if it fails to fit into the *ensemble* it is always destroyed. Hence there is in his pictures no corner or space that is neglected or hastily blocked in. All is as perfect as he knows how to make it, and I have heard him say, not rarely, that a little glimpse of sky, some little peep into the open, has given him as much labour as the entire picture.

For this excessive scrupulousness, this difficulty to be satisfied with his own work Alma Tadema has often been criticised by critics. Quite unjustly so, surely. Without this quality half of his power would be absent. It is due to this great attention to detail, this ceaseless searching after ever greater perfection, that Alma Tadema has made for himself a style of his own. Thus, for example, when he perceived that his colouring was too sombre, he reformed it by dint of diligence and care. He has never deceived himself regarding his own limitations

—for who has not limitations, even among the greatest?—nor has he ever juggled with his æsthetic conscience.

An emancipation from the conventional codes that is almost Japanese is another feature of his work. Alma Tadema does not hesitate to show us some of his personages as standing half outside the canvas, or cut through mid-body, or strangely placed in corners, or at the edge of the composition. Neither does he deem it needful that the principal action, as laid down by academic canons, should be placed in the very centre of the picture. It is this that gives the unusual note to many of his compositions, that was unusual in the days when they were still unknown, for since those days his work has been subjected to that imitation which the old proverb tells us is the sincerest form of flattery.

Sterner and more stately than *Spring*, indeed grand in its conception and execution, is *An Audience at Agrippa's*, in which a whole historic epoch is crystallized and rendered concrete. Here fidelity to archæological truth has but enhanced the importance of the scene and helped to throw it into prominence; nor are the details unduly emphasized to the detriment of



### AN AUDIENCE AT AGRIPPA'S.

*By permission of the Berlin Photographic Company*



the whole. In some respects this is one of Tadema's best conceived and most satisfactorily executed pictures. From an atrium on a high level, down a broad flight of steps, majestically descends Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, the greatest and mightiest burgher of his day. He is clad in imperial red, and stands out marvellously against the white marble of the stairs. His face is set with a look of stern determination that speaks of unbending will. He is followed by a crowd of persons, some of whom are still bowing, though Agrippa has passed by. Upon the landing at the bottom of the stairs—a marvel of blue mosaics with a tiger skin lying across it—there is a table. On this stands a silver Mars and materials for writing, for the use of two scribes standing behind it. Note the character in these heads, the close-cropped hair that denotes their servile rank, the cringing salute, each trying to outbid the other in humility of manner. Just before these figures, at the foot of the staircase, stands the world-famed Vatican statue of Augustus Imperator, the only man whose supremacy proud Agrippa would acknowledge, his device being, "To obey in masterly fashion, but obedience to one person only." Below this statue, where the staircase seems to turn at the

landing, is another group. These three suitors, father, son, and daughter, are about to render a gift to accompany their petition, for they know it is well to conciliate even the wealthy with gifts. Behind the whole shimmers one of those wonderful effects of light and sky that Tadema rarely fails to introduce. Like his Dutch ancestors, he is never happy unless he can get some peep into the open through a window or a terrace. He welcomes any device by which is accomplished an outlet to the sky, producing thus an enhanced sense of space and atmosphere.

The greater part of this picture was painted in 1875, when the artist spent the winter in Rome, being driven out of England by the wreck of his lovely house in Regent's Park. I well remember those days in the Eternal City, and one little incident connected with this picture illustrates a delightful trait in Alma Tadema's character and his naive enjoyment of his own work. He had finished the tiger skin which lies at the foot of the stairs, and in his delight over its successful achievement, he asked me in boyish glee, "Don't you see him wag his tail?"

Even in the indoor picture called *An Earthly*

*Paradise* (see *frontispiece*), the sense of atmosphere and space is not absent. The tale is here told with direct simplicity, a young mother adoring her firstborn as mothers have done since time began. The dress, the furniture, the surroundings are classic, the sentiment is of all times and all ages.

*A Reading from Homer* (see illustration, p. 16) reproduces some of Tadema's favourite devices,—a marble semicircular bench, a distant glimpse of tranquil sapphire seas, lustrous garments, and flower-wreathed characters. With eager enthusiasm the reader seated on his chair recites from a roll of papyrus that rests upon his knees. Of his four auditors only the woman, daffodil-wreathed, sits upon the marble exedra. One hand rests upon a tambourine, beside which is flung a bunch of flowers. The other holds that of a youth who sits upon the ground beside her. His other hand touches a lyre idly, but without sound, his entire interest is centred upon the reciter, whose words he follows with the eyes of his soul and of his intellect. Yet another youth lies prone upon the marble floor, his chin resting upon his hand. He, too, gazes in entranced wonder as he listens to the im-

mortal verses of the Hellenic bard. On the left stands another figure, also flower-garlanded and wrapped in a toga. His face reveals that his, too, is a keen appreciation of the power of the words being recited. Rarely has even Tadema's magic brush painted a more luminous work, so suggestive of sunlight, so truly transfigured and remote from life's grosser moments. Here, too, his flesh treatment is above his own high average. The modelling of the woman's figure and of the lover is especially fine.

It seems incredible, and yet it is true, that this composition, a large one for Alma Tadema, with its five figures and innumerable accessories, was entirely painted in the brief space of two months. Still, though completed in so short a time, the preliminary studies, including an abandoned picture, which was to have been called *Plato*, filled eight months of close application.

Not unlike in general treatment and in general purpose to the *Reading from Homer* is the picture simply entitled *Sappho*. In order to properly comprehend this work, however, some knowledge of the life story of the Greek poetess is required. Not a few visitors to the Royal Academy, where

ΑΡΡΗΟ.

B1 Performance of the Burmese Fluteplayer (on stage)





the picture was exhibited, imagined, with pardonable inaccuracy, that the seated figure playing the lute, and which certainly, at first sight, seems the most prominent, filled the title role. Instead, this is Alcaeus, the man who desired to gain the support of the mighty and gifted Sappho, for a political scheme of which he was the chief promoter. But besides being a political rhymer, Alcaeus was also Sappho's lover, and as he is here rendered, it is the lover who is most emphasized. Sappho herself sits behind a species of desk, on which rests the wreath, bound with ribands, that was the crown of poets. She is robed in pale green and gray, and in accordance with tradition, her raven black hair is filleted with violets. Beside her stands a young girl, her daughter, a sweetly graceful form, less lovely than the mother, but suggestive of maidenhood's enchantments. The poetess is seated on the lowest tier of the marble triple-rowed exedra, on which, at a respectful distance, are also disposed some of the pupils of her school. Dark, wide-branched fir trees spread their crowns above this bench. We are made to realize that their trunks are rooted far below, there where the deep blue sea, *shimmering in the background, laps the earth that*

supports this scene. Through the branches is seen the sky, a sky of purest sapphire, a blue distinct from that of the tideless tranquil ocean, but no less glorious or intense. Nowhere perhaps better than here has Tadema reproduced the effects of summer seas and skies in their brilliant ardour, their palpitating delicacy of hue and texture. The very air that pervades the picture is hot and light, saturated and quivering with the quickening pulsation of a southern sun.

The intimate life of the Roman women has often attracted Alma Tadema's brush. We see this again and again in *Well-protected Slumber*, in *Quiet Pets*, in *Departure*, the scene suggested by Theocritus's fifteenth Idyll, in *The Bath*, in *Apodyterium* (or women's disrobing-room), and it is also accentuated in the *Shrine of Venus*, a scene in a Roman hairdresser's shop. This picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1889, where it attracted considerable attention, not only because of the perfection of its painting, the beauty of marbles and metals and textiles, the richness of its soft, full colour, its yellows and blues, but because of the masterly skill with which the human figures were painted (see illustration, p. 32).

Two beautiful young girls, one awaiting her turn to be *coiffée*, caressing the masses of her thick, dark, loosened hair, the other already dressed, lingering to gossip with her friend, are reclining on a marble bench. These are so entirely absorbed in their own beauty that they pay but slight attention to the entrance of a tall, simply attired matron, who, glancing inquiringly in their direction, passes on to an inner apartment. In sweeping by she has carelessly plucked one from a mass of blossoms heaped upon a coloured marble table in the outer shop, and her hand, holding the flower, falls heavily beside the warm white folds of her gown. At the open lunette shop window, exposing to view coils and twists of hair, some attendants are distributing vases and lotions to the customers, whose heads appear above the marble balustrade, on which stands a deep blue vase, encrusted with exquisite enamel figures. The figure of the attendant who is reaching down an alabaster pot is especially graceful and free in poise.

Although the marble screen, surmounted by fluted columns, and the lunette window are sliced off at the top, the picture gives no impression of confinement. This sense of space is increased by the rim of a marble basin in the

immediate foreground, the reclining figures which lower the eye level, and the skilful introduction through the open window, above the heads of the passers-by, of the entrance columns and intricate façade of an adjoining building. The triangle of blue sky and the blue glass vase standing out against the distant columns of the building across the square form one of Alma Tadema's many happy combinations.

In some respects the most important picture painted by Alma Tadema of late years is called *The Coliseum*, which excited wondering praise for its masterly handling, its colour scheme, its archaeological knowledge, when exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1896. Attached to the title in the catalogue was this motto from Lord Byron's "Don Juan" that gave the keynote to that which the artist desired to express :

" And here the buzz of eager nations ran  
" In murmured pity, or loud-roared applause,  
" As man was slaughtered by his fellow man,  
" And wherefore slaughtered, wherefore, but because  
" Such were the bloody circus' genial laws,  
" And the Imperial pleasure. Wherefore not ? "

Dominating the whole picture, and occupying more than half of its canvas, is the huge Flavian

Amphitheatre colloquially known throughout the whole world as *the Coliseum*. Even in the title therefore in this case the inanimate object takes the first place, relegating to a secondary rank the human interest. Very wonderfully does the artist convey to our eyes a sense of the gigantic bulk and height of the huge Amphitheatre,\* and with accurate archæological knowledge has he reconstructed its form upon his canvas. Here are its two tiers of arcades, whose arches, we learn from the evidence of tradition, inscriptions and ancient coins, were filled, as in the painting, with groups of colossal white marble statues. Above these arcades rose a series of pilasters, and above these again, supported on the topmost parapet, were stout poles that held the velarium or canvas awning which sheltered from the sun or rain the thousands of spectators gathered to witness the bloody deeds which took place in the arena below. These supporting poles stand out distinct against the glowing sky, a sky always introduced if possible by Alma Tadema. The hour chosen is late afternoon, when from out the Amphitheatre pour the thousands who have lately thronged the tiers upon tiers of seats that surrounded the arena, high functionaries and proletariat, tender-born ladies

and women of the market-place, all equally eager to witness the orgies of blood that were here enacted. Outside the broad walk that encircled the Amphitheatre stood the famous Baths of Titus, second only in magnificence to the Coliseum itself. Alma Tadema has imagined for it a balcony of white marble, raised high above the road. On its parapet stand tall wide-mouthed sculptured vases, connected together with thick festoons of yellow daffodils proving that the season of the year is Alma Tadema's favourite one of early spring. A nude bronze statue of a nymph wreathing her tresses, in accordance with the usages of the Baths, crowns the parapet of the balcony. Around her feet too, are twined the wreaths of yellow flowers that give such a sunny note to the whole scheme of colour. Two ladies and a child have taken up their station on this festively decorated parapet, evidently come thither to witness some spectacle of quite unusual importance that has called to the arena not only the populace, but even the Consul himself, who, preceded by his clients, and attended by his lictors, is seen issuing from the main exit of the Coliseum, which was almost in front of the Baths. To keep the way clear for the grandes, some guards are roughly push-



THE COLISEUM.

• By permission of the Berlin Photographic Company



ing back the dense crowd that is packed on either side of the roadway. Yet another crowd is issuing from the side door of the Coliseum. This mob is chiefly composed of plebs, though among them are mingled palahquin bearers plying for hire. Yet further off again is seen the Arch of Constantine and the famous goal known as the Meta Sudans.

It is not quite evident what it is that chiefly interests these lady spectators. We are told that the dark-haired and elder of the two is the little girl's mother. For safety's sake she plucks at the child's gown for fear the little one in her excitement should fall over the low parapet. The younger lady is more eager in her interest. She, who is supposed to be the child's governess, has evidently recognized some one, friend or lover, in the crowd immediately below to whom the child is excitedly pointing. The "Athenæum," when describing this picture on its first exhibition, wrote concerning it :

" It would be difficult to do justice to the breadth, brilliance and homogeneity (in spite of its innumerable details) of this splendid picture. The painting of the minutest ornaments, the folds of the ladies' garments, even the huge festoons we have referred to, and the delicate

sculptor's work of the vases and mouldings on the balcony are equally noteworthy. Even more to be admired are the faces, of which that of the maiden in blue is undoubtedly the sweetest and freshest of all Mr. Alma Tadema's imaginings. Her companion (the more stately matron) who wears a diadem of silver in her black hair, illustrates a pure Greek type of which the painter has given us several examples, but none so fine as this one, which is very skilfully relieved against the peacock fan of gorgeous colours which she holds in her hand. It is easy to imagine that in her noble spirit some thought of the victims of the Amphitheatre arose, which explains the painter's intention in choosing the motto of the Coliseum."

The picture is certainly in every respect worthy of Alma Tadema's high reputation and is a perfect example of his style, a brilliant work, true and complete in every touch.

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